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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KAMPALA 000587

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM MOPS MARR UG CG SU
SUBJECT: UGANDA: GAMES THE ACHOLI DIASPORA CONTINUE TO PLAY

REF: A. KAMPALA 504
 IB. 08 KAMPALA 743

Classified By: P/E Chief Kathleen FitzGibbon for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).).

¶11. (C) Summary: The Ugandan Government is investigating the latest attempt by Acholi diaspora to mobilize support for a new rebellion in northern Uganda. The arrest of low level participants continues while the Government decides its next steps, which may include a public outing of Acholi diaspora spoilers. End Summary.

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THE PLAYERS
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¶12. (C) In early 2008, former Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) defectors identified Charlie Lakony (a.k.a. Rembo) as the primary mobilizer for a new resistance group called the Peoples' Patriotic Front (PPF). Rembo is a Kenyan-based member of the Acholi diaspora who runs a non-governmental organization, "Friends for Peace in Africa," and travels between San Diego, California and Nairobi. Former Ugandan Government negotiator Betty Bigombe reported that Rembo, who calls the war in northern Uganda "genocide," was behind various attempts to recruit disgruntled northerners into anti-Museveni rebel groups. The group had begun stockpiling weapons in the districts of West Nile. Government operatives uncovered the plot and began a series of sweeps between January and March 2008 that uncovered several arms caches in and around Arua. These sweeps were reported in the local press.

¶13. (C) Rembo remains at odds with the other major diaspora player, Powel P'Ojwang (a.k.a. Ladit Balgara), who is an Acholi businessman based in London with close ties to Sudanese President Al-Bashir through oil interests. We do not have any information on Balgara's current plans and intentions.

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GOVERNMENT PICKING UP PARTICIPANTS
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¶14. (C) The latest plot was exposed when the Government received a tip from the U.S. non-governmental organization (NGO) Invisible Children regarding the location of Patrick Komekech. He was wanted by the security services for impersonating LRA leaders to extort money from government officials, NGOs, and Acholi leaders. Komekech is purportedly a former child soldier abducted by the LRA. Invisible Children had featured him in its documentaries. Invisible Children reported that Komekech had been in Nairobi and had recently reappeared in Gulu, where he was staying with the NGO. Security organizations jumped on the tip and immediately arrested Komekech on March 5. He had a satellite telephone and other gadgets, which were confiscated when security forces picked him up. (Note: The satellite

telephone is believed to be one being used to call the International Organization for Migration (IOM) with someone pretending to be Okot Odhiambo with a fake defection plot. End Note.)

¶5. (C) Bigombe, who has known Komekech for the past ten years, said Komekech had confessed to being part of a new anti-government movement in the north. Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence (CMI) officers confirmed Komekech's confession and said that the new group, which was previously called the Uganda' Peoples Front (UPF), is now the PPF. Its objective is to overthrow the Ugandan Government. Komekech reportedly gave the locations of several arms caches in Pader District with a total of 600 weapons. The group had begun recruiting throughout the north, from West Nile to Pader. Komekech named several former LRA combatants that had been integrated into the Ugandan Peoples Defense Forces (UPDF) as members of the new group as well as other civilian participants. The security services have been slowly arresting these individuals and interrogating them. The detainees have been kept separately, but all are reporting similar information about the group, its intentions, and its financiers, according to Bigombe.

¶6. (C) A Gulu-based "journalist", Patrick Otim, also was picked up, according to press reports. Gulu Resident District Commissioner Walter Ochora told P/E Chief that Otim is not a journalist, but an administrative officer at a local radio station. According to Ochora, Otim had long-been suspected of involvement in anti-government activities. Ochora reported that Bishop Odama, a prominent and well-respected Acholi religious leader, had been implicated

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as funding airtime for both the LRA and the new organization.

In addition, Odama allegedly had harbored some of the group's members. The Government is considering its options on Odama. Ochora also warned LRA defectors Sunday Otto and Richard Odong Cao to scale back activities, such as expressing disgruntlement with the government, which could be misconstrued as participating in subversive groups. Otto and Odong refute Ochora's allegations.

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NEXT STEPS
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¶7. (C) P/E Chief asked a Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence (CMI) officer on June 9 if the Government was planning to charge Komekech and the others in court. The officer replied that Komekech and the other low-level operatives will be released. They allegedly have been cooperative and agreed to reveal publicly the names of their supporters in the diaspora. The officer said that CMI was waiting for President Museveni to approve the plan to publicly "shame" the diaspora.

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COMMENT
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¶8. (C) Several sources outside the security services say that various Government officials may be overplaying the level of threat posed by the rebel group for their own interests. They claim the group is still in its formative stages. However, its existence reinforces a widely-held belief within the southern-based government "that the Acholi will never surrender," which in turn reinforces government suspicions about the north and Ugandan exiles.

BROWNING